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WHERE IS HOMELAND? WHO IS A FELLOW VILLAGER? DISTRIBUTIVE IDENTITIES AMONG OVERSEAS CHINESE IN EUROPE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Where is homeland (jiaxiang, guxiang)? Who is a fellow villager (tongxiang, laoxiang)?[1] Among overseas Chinese in Europe these seemingly simple and clear questions cover complex and unclear issues of identity. Many overseas Chinese regard China as their homeland and the host country as their second homeland. Some overseas Chinese metaphorically liken themselves to married daughters, whose parental home is China, and whose country of residence is the in-laws' house; like married women in traditional China, they experience a conflict of affection, loyalty and duty. Many overseas Chinese in Europe vest their love in more than two countries, for China where their forefathers originated is their first homeland, the country where they were born is their second homeland, and the country where they live is their third homeland. When I asked one, "what about the relationship with your homeland?" the response was, "where is the homeland?" This overseas Chinese who lives in Europe is born in Taiwan of parents of Mainland

[1] This paper was originally prepared for the First International Conference on Ethnic Chinese, Jinan University, Guangzhou, December 5-8, 2000

stock, and so is considered an outsider, a "waishengren," in Taiwan. All overseas Chinese seem to have diverse affective bonds to China and other places.

Identifying fellow villagers is also difficult for many overseas Chinese. In Europe, Chinese native-place associations have many patterns, representing a village, a town, a city, a county, several counties, or a province. Therefore the definition of "fellow villager" fluctuates along a scale between somebody from the same village and any Chinese; sometimes it is even a bond between people claiming that their ancestors lived in the same village several generations back. Overseas Chinese observers in Europe have diverging opinions about the native-place associations. Some claim not to have a special passion for fellow villagers, some think that native-place associations are good both for the fellow villagers and for the overseas Chinese community. Occasionally one hears that native-place associations are retrograde and harmful for the overseas Chinese community.

The paper will explore the reasons behind the complex patterns of loyalty, the motivations behind this *distributive identity*. Why do overseas Chinese in Europe consider "home" in so many ways? Why do they join together with people of so different origins as their co-natives? The paper will examine the distributive identity (and its manifestations as sub-ethnic identities and plural loyalties) by exploring how overseas Chinese in Europe talk about their identities.

This will be achieved by analysing 25 in-depth interviews with overseas Chinese community leaders across Europe, conducted in early 1998.[2] The analysis consists of a detailed examination of the usage of core concepts of ethnic identity, exploring their meanings in details; from this material, I will abstract the underlying discourses of identity. This research procedure aims at building concepts on the basis of empirical data, and provides fresh insights into the ways otherwise elusive concepts and ideas are used.

The paper will seek to establish how sub-ethnic groups distinguish themselves from each other and how multiple identities among the overseas Chinese in Europe are sustained. I will use Fredrik Barth's concepts of *ethnic groups and boundaries* and Pierre Bourdieu's theories of *field* and of *social and cultural capital* as frameworks for understanding the construction of ethnic identity and in particular for understanding its many dimensions.

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[2] The interviews were made within the framework of my ongoing PhD research. The interviewees were all chairmen or vice-chairmen or -women of pan-European Chinese associations, based in Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Belgium. They included people with different dialect groups and places of birth and ancestral origin.

The notion of *distributive ethnic identities* in my analysis signifies the *social* practice of constructing multiple identities. I hypothesise that ethnic Chinese in Europe have many diverse identities which do not exclude each other and which create flexible patterns of social interaction across sub-ethnic boundaries.

The paper will, accordingly, both address the theoretical issues of ethnic identity and be grounded in an empirical exploration of how overseas Chinese community leaders presented their identities in qualitative research interviews.

The interviews reveal that concepts of identity are fluctuating, reflecting active choice by the interviewees. They also show that the interviewees understand how identities are formed, their multiple nature and how they can be used as instruments of social power. Identity, in this analysis, is not understood to be opportunistic, assumed and abandoned by the individual to gratify immediate needs, but to be a collectively established condition that is interpreted dynamically by the members of the group. The *distributive* nature of ethnic identity means that members of ethnic groups simultaneously can assert different loyalties and assume diverse identities. Identities are thus mutually inclusive. It is possible to be recognised (by other Chinese) as an overseas Chinese, even if one has a strong native-place identity with a village in Guangdong, is born and raised in Taiwan, asserts citizenship in Germany, and feels a pillar of society in a small Rhineland town. What is more, the *distribution* of identity between these spheres is mutually dependent and incremental. Status in overseas Chinese associations translates into formal status in local community, which again raises the standing in the home jurisdiction.

The paper seeks to go beyond absolute concepts of ethnic identity as fixed containers of specific cultural traits and firm boundaries, and explores their dynamic and distributive nature as it appears from a small sample of overseas Chinese leaders in Europe.

2. Distributive Identity Expressions among Overseas Chinese Community Leaders in Europe

I base the notion of distributive identities and the hypothesis on the ways in which interviewees expressed themselves in 25 interviews I made with overseas Chinese community leaders in Europe. Using qualitative analysis software (NVivo), I coded two expressions as *nodes*: homeland (jiaxiang, guxiang), and fellow villager (tongxiang, laoxiang). Based on these nodes, I collected

the interviewees' expressions on "where is homeland," "who is a fellow villager" and their opinions about "native-place associations," and summarised the findings. Although 25 interviews may seem a small sample, the interviewees occupy a special position among the overseas Chinese in Europe: they are their leaders, interact with each other within what I elsewhere call a "leader field,"[3] and represent the overseas Chinese community. Their expressions not only lend voice to their personal opinions, but also represent the leader field discourse. Therefore, I consider the sample as representative in a normative sense; while it does not represent the overseas Chinese in a quantitative sense, it represents important opinion formers within the overseas Chinese community across Europe.

My method is to explore how words are used by these opinion formers, and how this usage reflects ways of thinking and issues of how the social reality is mediated in the use of concepts.

2.1 Where is Homeland?

The notion of homeland relates to the sub-ethnic boundaries among the overseas Chinese in Europe. My qualitative exploration begins with the interviewees' reflections on "where is homeland". Summarising the 25 interviewees' expressions, "homeland" encompassed the following meanings:

Not only the place where one is born and has grown up or the place of origin of one's forefathers is regarded as homeland, it is also the place which has special significance in one's life, and it is the place with which one entertains more social relations. One was born in place A, grew up in place B which was also the place of origin of his forefathers, and he worked in place C. This interviewee regarded place C as homeland more than place A and B, for place C was more important in his life. One formulated the problem differently, regarding his forefathers' place of origin as his homeland, but the place where he had lived and where he came from as *more important* than his homeland, because it was part of his social communication. Social integration, thus, seems to be an important factor for homeland identification.

Even if one decided on a principle for homeland identification, such as one's birth place, one's forefathers' place of origin, the place where one has lived and worked, or the place where one has the strongest social integration and so on, it is still an issue how the homeland reflects an area or jurisdiction, e.g. a village, a town or township, a county, a city, a province or the whole country.

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[3] In my PhD dissertation (Liang 2001), I regard the leaders as constituting a "field" in Pierre Bourdieu's sense.

People from Wenzhou referred to Zhejiang as their homeland, a person from Dapeng (a small town in Baoan) pointed at Shenzhen as his homeland. Some simply referred to China as such, to the Mainland, or to Taiwan as their homeland, or equalled homeland with fatherland (zuguo). Homeland, accordingly, can be specific and local or general and abstract.

The notion of homeland sometimes refers to "greater China" (da Zhongguo). Some interviewees related the homeland issue to the issue of China's unification, thus opposing those who use their understanding of Taiwan as their homeland to favour the idea of Taiwan independence.

The notion of homeland (jiaxiang guannian) was by some related to localism (difangzhuyi or difang guannian), and regarded as negative, as opposed to Chinese unity, and as a basis for local favouritism undermining the fairness and even-handedness required of overseas Chinese affairs work. This latter understanding, however, was only shared by few of the interviewees.

Some mixed the notion of homeland with that of family (jiating guannian); or linked the passion for the fatherland with that for the homeland, the nation, and the family. Some regarded the love of the fatherland and the homeland as a natural instinct, if one fails to harbour such love, one betrays one's nation. To "love the country, to love the homeland" (aiguo aixiang) is a set phrase used in official statements by Mainland officials, and occasionally in the form "aixiang aiguo" by Taiwan officials. In the discourse common among my interviewees, they thus not only conflate love for the fatherland (or country) with love for the homeland. They consider the passion for the homeland as synonymous with love for family, nation, and fatherland, and they see this as a fundamental, natural condition of being Chinese.

"Homeland," in spite of its varying meanings, to the majority of the interviewees stood out as an important element of their Chinese identity. Some, however, did regard it as unimportant. One regarded himself as a cosmopolitan, thinking it unnecessary to visit the homeland. Several had never visited their homeland or had broken their relationship with it since they left it, having no information about its current situation. One asked: "Where is homeland? Taiwan or the Mainland?" People originating in the Mainland tend to regard her as Taiwanese, because she came from Taiwan, but the Taiwanese do not regard her as Taiwanese, because she is "waishengren". She finds it difficult to regard either as her homeland.

Many interviewees regarded their host country as their second homeland (dier guxiang or dier jiaxiang) or as their second fatherland (dier zuguo). They claimed that love for the fatherland and love for the homeland do not preclude integration with the host country. Some tended to consider

both "returning back to the native soil" (luoye gui gen) and "sinking the roots in the foreign soil" (luo di shen gen).

The term "homeland" is used to describe the practice of "supporting the construction of the homeland" (zhichi jiaxiang jianshe), and patriotism (aiguizhuyi). Support for the homeland's construction and contributions to the homeland are the practical manifestations of their patriotic passion. Supporting education, building schools, bridges and roads, supporting the "hope project" (xiwang gongcheng), and donating aid funds to China's disaster areas, no matter whether in their homeland or other places in China, all belong to the practice of "supporting the construction of the homeland".

It is obviously difficult to define "homeland", for the term is used flexibly with reference to many different things. Homeland - jiaxiang or guxiang - in the usage of the interviewees was wider and more complex than the formal use of the concept, where it designates either place of birth or of one's forefathers. We may assume that these flexible identifications are related to the existence in Europe of overlapping and competing native-place associations among the overseas Chinese. For example, the Zhejiang associations compete with Wenzhou, Qingtian and Wencheng associations. Do they overlap? Do they integrate with each other? How do they define their mutual boundaries? Are they reflections of complex ideas of where home is? I will examine these issues in section three.

2.2 Who is a Fellow Villager?

If the location of "homeland" is unsure, how one can distinguish a "fellow villager"? The interviewees' formulations about their "fellow villagers" (tongxiang or laoxiang) are similar to the formulations on "homeland", not well defined, flexible, pointing in several directions. The interviewees disagreed most on whether or not they felt "more friendly with a fellow villager". I asked them questions about their relationships with fellow villagers and other overseas Chinese. Some claimed they "feel more friendly with fellow villagers", while others had "no special feeling for fellow villagers". The feeling of friendly relationships had several dimensions in the interviews: (1) it comes from the nature or is a natural manifestation of national passion; (2) it is a notion of the homeland soil (xiangtu guannian); and (3) it is reflected in the same language, customs, habits, and the notions of fellowship. One interviewee used the cliché "with one voice and one breath" (tongsheng tongqi) to explain why they feel more friendly.

The converse, the lack of feelings for fellow villagers took on quite different dimensions: (1) Long periods outside China has broadened the idea of region and led to the loss of special feelings towards fellow villagers; (2) leaders of overseas Chinese associations have the obligation not only to serve fellow villagers, but also all other Chinese; and (3) many conflicts and frictions occur between fellow villagers and people from the same surname groups, because they always compete and compare themselves with each other and seek confrontation. Maybe for this reason, one interviewee preferred to seek friends among people from other places, people who were *not* his fellow villagers. The common point - shared by most of the interviewees who did not prefer fellow villagers to others - was that friendships and other relationships should not rely on whether or not somebody was a fellow villager, but should be based on personal behaviour and other feelings of affinity.

Either side of the disagreement, however, was equally uncertain about what distinguishes a fellow villager. The term "fellow villager" includes a range of connotations and meanings, like accepting a friend's fellow villager as one's own fellow villager, to equal fellow villager with any overseas Chinese, to enlarge the perspective of fellow villager to any Chinese, including expanding from "small fellow villager" (xiao tongxiang) to "large fellow villager" (da tongxiang, meaning "Chinese"), or to use the term to designate people who lean towards or originate in either the Mainland or in Taiwan.

If one is not sure about how to define a fellow villager, how can one judge one's feelings towards fellow villagers? This did not seem an issue. When they answered the questions on fellow villagers, they seemed to have a clear idea of what it meant, also in relation to themselves. It was only when I went further, probing into the meaning of the concept that the uncertainty and flexibility of the term became obvious.

If we take the expressions on "homeland" and "fellow villager", we might expect them to overlap, so that while the "homeland" could have any scale between village and nation, the same could apply to "fellow villager", a person from any scale of jurisdiction. However, this is not the case, for the term "fellow villager" seems in the usage of many of the interviewees to be reserved for describing boundaries between sub-ethnic groups among the Chinese.

The interviewees made many normative statements on fellow villagers. They must, for example, help and support each other because they have "left village and well behind" (li xiang bei jing). The notion of fellow villager (tongxiang guannian) is necessary in old age, for you need fellow villager companionship to fight loneliness. There is a general understanding that the passion

towards fellow villagers is something special, different from that towards other Chinese; fellow villagers integrate differently among other nations and peoples in the world. The Chinese have, so the interviewees, the idea that they must "bring success and achievement back to the homeland" (yijin huanxiang), i.e. bring status to their parents and fellow villagers. There is also the perception that the Chinese focus on individualism (gerenzhuyi), familism (jiatingzhuyi), and localism (difangzhuyi) and fellow villager-ism (tongxiangzhuyi); individualism, the initiative of the individual, is, according to one interviewee, at the core of social activity; the individual needs the family and the fellow villagers to realise his individualism. The notion of fellow villager, accordingly, is necessary, and its dimensions differ from the dimensions of "hometown".

My interviewees were all leaders of overseas Chinese associations in European countries. This, of course, determined their view of fellow villagers. Fellow villagers are there to help each other, but once their lives are stable, their scope of co-operation should extend further, encompassing people who are not fellow villagers. Fellow villager as compatriot, and as a person who co-operates and does not engage in conflict, is an ideal norm imposed by association leaders. The moral superiority of the association leaders derives from helping fellow villagers and other Chinese alike. Limiting help to fellow villagers in a narrow sense is perceived as particularistic and selfish behaviour.

The conceptual diversity, therefore, had much to do with the status of the interviewees. They tended not only to differ from each other, but also within interviews. This reflects the situational utility of these concepts; it is not just the association leaders who set the norms, they are also trapped by the ambiguity and flexibility of the concepts.

2.3 Opinions on Native-place Associations

The interviewees' opinions on native-place association are very rich. They were collected by asking about:

- What are your opinions on native-place associations?

- Do you think that the native-place association are likely to divide the overseas Chinese community?

The opinions diverged, from criticising the native-place association to endorsing it, from regarding it as both positive and negative, to understanding it as a Chinese cultural phenomenon.

The main criticism concerned the divisive nature of native-place associations that set up their own small circles (xiao quanzi), harming the unity of the Chinese. The view was that the native-place associations converge around the "sound of the native village" (xiangyin) and "local protectionism" (difang baohuzhuyi), while in reality Mandarin is the current language of the community and dialects are not needed. They thought that the country must come first and the regional or local feelings last, for Chinese unity is the most important. Native-place associations are considered to harm this unity, for native-place associations use localist notions (xiangtu guannian) to substitute for the national idea (minzu yishi). Setting up small circles, separating themselves from each other, native-place associations may disperse the energy and power of the overseas Chinese community. One said,

> I am not against it, but I think that the Chinese tend to establish associations as small circles (xiao quanzi)

and another:

> There were many small circles in the Chinese community, of course, including native-place associations, because they want to have their own small community.

They thought that native-place associations were highly divisive. Some claimed they were engaged in petty conflicts with each other, and others that

> The native-place association is created by a feeling of inferiority, they (use the native-place association to) beg others for recognition.

One claimed that

> the Chinese government does not endorse the native-place association, the Chinese government only accepts it because it is patriotic.

Some of the criticism of the native-place association was very sharp, such as: (1) the native-place association is feudal; (2) it is the local nationalism (difang minzuzhuyi); (3) it is anarchist; and (4) it negates selflessness, because it only protects the fellow villager's interest.

The majority of the interviewees found the native-place association good and necessary. They pointed at three main points describing the functions of the native-place association.

First, there is the function of communication: To know, to meet, to interact, to get together with fellow villagers. Some regarded the native-place association as a sentimental organisation, an association of fellow villagers. It may do something for the fellow villagers and enrich their lives. It may bring together people from the same place, so they may help each other, and give the elderly a feeling of belonging, and indulge in their homeland sentiments. Social interaction, they claimed, is important for the overseas Chinese.

Second, there is the function of unity and mutual help (tuanjie huzhu). Some pointed out that the native-place association may unite the fellow villagers, forms a power to provide for the fellow villagers, and to protect themselves. Some said, the native-place association may help the fellow villagers to solve their problems; if somebody gets into trouble, the native-place association may help solve it. Some focused on the economic function, such as forming an information and social network, and giving economic and business support. Some think it is easier to unite a small group in the name of native-place association because it engenders greater cohesion at crucial moments (for example, when overseas Chinese are discriminated against); even so the associations must take "Chinese" as the primary and not limit themselves to protect the fellow villagers. Some thought, that is difficulty to say what the function of the native-place association is, but that it may have an influence, at least in demonstrating unity. Accordingly, the native-place association simply represents overseas Chinese unity.

Third, there is the bridging function: to link the homeland, China, and the host society. As we have already seen, the border of "homeland" is flexible, when the interviewees talk about the bridging function of the native-place, the scale in a similar way ranges from a village to the whole of China. In respect of this, the interviewees identified three functions: (a) To build up and develop the economic and cultural interchange between the homeland, China, and the host country. The native-place association may, in their view, offer advantages and opportunities for fellow villagers to do business in China; (b) To develop their homeland, to support their homeland's construction. This mainly consisted of infrastructure investments and charitable donations; and (c) To welcome fellow villagers and relatives from China, meaning receiving official delegations from local places in China.

Many interviewees found that native-place associations rarely are in conflict with other associations, and they offered many reasons why native-place associations should continue to exist. These focused on two main aspects:

(a) There is no conflict between the native-place and other associations, or between them and the Chinese community as such. Their opinions included:

> The Chinese must unite, and the native-place associations do unite them,
>
> The native-place association has the localism colour, but only local passion, no interest conflict with other overseas Chinese.
>
> The native-place association does not affect the overseas Chinese unity and is not separate from the overseas Chinese community.
>
> Different associations may choose different names (e.g. reflecting local difference); if only they contribute to the overseas Chinese community, there is no problem
>
> Different associations may have different purposes, the native-place association lets the fellow villagers get together, even if it does divide the overseas Chinese community, if there is the federation of the associations, it may not be a problem.
>
> Every association has its own function, the small circle can expand into big society through interaction.

(b) The native-place association is similar to other associations, different associations may have the same functions, such as providing contact, communication and community service, support and charitable donations to China. Like other associations, native-place associations are all bound through relations between people, and they may co-operate and have good relationships.

Some opinions were neutral, largely weighing the above arguments for and against in various combinations.

Some interviewees regarded the native-place association as a representation of Chinese culture. Organising the native-place association is a Chinese cultural trait, reflecting Chinese customs and habits, descending from Confucianism.

> Abroad, to look for the relatives (renqin renqi) has to do with Chinese culture, so there are many native-place associations. Of course it may have to do with fame, because status is important to the Chinese.

Native-place associations were described as a Chinese cultural phenomenon.

There were many statements about what native-place organisations ought and ought not do:

(1) The native-place associations ought not to be narrow, they must be broad, such as a Taiwan association, not only accepting people who speak Taiwanese (Hokkien), but people from Taiwan in general.

(2) Where the native-place association creates friendly feelings (among fellow villagers), one must do the same with all Chinese, everybody must unite.

(3) Native-place associations must be innovative and accept non-fellow villagers as friends.

(4) If the leaders of native-place associations have no sense of "greater China" and of China's unity, it may cause trouble, e.g. when Taiwanese associations veer in the direction of Taiwanese independence.

(5) Even in the small society, if one wants to be a leader, one needs the ability to influence (yinxiang li).

(6) Native-place associations like other associations must serve the overseas Chinese compatriots.

The diversity and flexibility of the homeland and fellow villager concepts hides their cohesion, the fact that these notions are shared across the Chinese community and are used to negotiate the relations between people within the system of overseas Chinese communities. The agreement about the basic terms, therefore, is just as significant as the differences. The fundamental agreement between the interviewees is that the Chinese must unite as a whole; they disagree on how to understand the role of sub-ethnic belonging, its ideas and its institutions.

Since 1980s, the number of native-place association in Europe has risen quickly, including many associations of people from Qingtian, Wenzhou, Wencheng, Chaozhou, Fujian, Hainan, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangdong, Taiwan and so on. These native-place associations have established borders within the overseas Chinese community and have given shape to different sub-ethnic groups.

The borders of these sub-ethnic groups are vague. I have given the example that alongside the Zhejiang association there are Qingtian, Wenzhou and Wencheng associations. There are Guangdong associations, and also associations for people from Siyi (also called Wuyi), Guangzhou-Zhaoqing, Dapeng, Nanhai-Shunde, Shenzhen and so on. For a long time there were two Shanghai associations in Paris.

What lies behind this variation in the meaning of homeland? Why the scaling up and down of the meaning of fellow villager? Why is there such an overlap and variation in the boundaries between native-place associations? In the following I will explore how these phenomena reflect a distributive identity.

3. Ethnic Identity: Interaction and Construction

3.1 Social Interaction and Ethnic Boundary

What is a sub-ethnic group, and how does it form its boundary?

Fredrik Barth (1969) defined the ethnic group as

> largely biologically self-perpetuating; [it] shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms; makes up a field of communication and interaction; has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969, 296).

Barth pointed out that it is

> the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses...If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion (Barth 1969, 300).

According to Barth's theory, it is the social interaction that forms the ethnic boundary, the ethnic boundary defines the ethnic group, forms the criteria on which the group is constituted and maintained. So, is it likewise the social interaction that forms the sub-ethnic group and delimits

its boundary? How does the social interaction give shape to the ethnic (or sub-ethnic) group's boundary? Barth did not give a clear answer. Here I try to use the case of the overseas Chinese community in Europe to examine its internal sub-ethnic boundary's construction to find an answer.

Sub-groups formed among the overseas Chinese community tend to exist for various different reasons. They are formed by circumstances of history, social structure and political system. But what is the reason to form sub-groups within the overseas Chinese community in Europe? If we assume that it is a function of social interaction, then how does the social interaction among the European overseas Chinese community construct the sub-ethnic groups?

Let us look at what the interviewees said about why the native-place associations are necessary and what their functions are. We have already summed up the functions of the associations as mutual help, communication and so on, all functions that do not really explain why the groups emerge. Some interviewees, however, claimed that some people want to gain fame by becoming leaders, so they organise the associations to acquire the title of chairman or president. It is easier to use the name of a native-place association to establish an association because the fellow villagers can more easily be united. Some pointed out that native-place associations are similar to other associations, they differ only in name from other associations. Accordingly, it seems that the fellow villager relationship and the homeland passion have become factors used by some people in their pursuit of social and economic advantage. A chairman of a native-place association may become an association leader among association leaders and so gain some fame, business opportunities and chances to meet some Chinese officials. Such contacts may be useful when one's family in China encounters problems.

When one interviewee talked about the association's function of welcoming Chinese officials and delegations, he mentioned that Chinese officials whose role is conceived of as restrictive and "political" have a cold welcome, while those who can influence the economy and break red tape were warmly welcomed. The claim is that the economic interest is a stronger motivation than passion for the homeland.

It is not difficult to understand why someone wants to organise a native-place association if being a chairman can bring such benefit. But what is in it for those who want to become members of native-place associations? All agree that they provide a place to get together socially, but so may other associations also do, one should think. Native-place associations, as opposed to other

overseas Chinese associations, have the explicit aim of mutual help based on fellow-villager solidarity. This may be an important incentive to participate.

There are various accounts of the evolution of associations in Europe. In many cases, an association starts as a generic association for all Chinese, but the advent of new migrants from one place in China shifts the balance between the members of the association, or rather, the needs of the new immigrants induce them and their fellow villagers among the earlier immigrants to form a new association that is more suited to provide social support, mutual help and so on. The upset balance in the earlier association encourages other groups to separate themselves out in their own associations. The balancing of power in an association should probably not be seen in abstract terms, but also in terms of personality. If an association provides ambitious leaders with sufficient opportunities for posts, it fulfils a function for them. If the opportunities for leadership posts become narrower, or the hierarchy of posts becomes disadvantageous for a leader, it is tempting to set up an alternative association.

The rationale of such changes will mainly be described in terms of the fellow-villager logic and not the relative status of individual leaders. Once one sub-ethnic group has emerged, more follow, claiming similar characteristics. In that process, dialect and small differences in habits may play a role. This may, of course, explain why native-place associations seem to follow a common pattern, for they emerge from similar dynamics in the overseas Chinese community. The representation of a group may be an issue. New migrants may find that the earlier migrants claiming largely the same origin do not share their migration experience, so they decide to mark their difference with a different reference to the jurisdiction in China, not Zhejiang, for example, but Wenzhou, even if the majority in a Zhejiang association may have Wenzhou as their hometown. Large numbers of migrants and growing diversity and sophistication in a Chinese community may simply call for more ways of integrating people in the community through associations, and native-place associations provide a proven template for such an endeavour. In particular, as some interviewees pointed out, native-place associations are a simple way of including community members within a wider system of overseas Chinese associations.

From the interviews, we can glean all these different rationales for the development of native-place associations; not one single explanation seems exhaustive.

External factors also determine the nature of the native-place associations. In particular, there is an interest among local government officials to entertain long-term stable relationships with overseas Chinese hailing from their regions, and their counterparts among overseas Chinese in

Europe can use the format of the native-place association to develop such links. The shared interest among overseas Chinese leaders and local officials is two-fold. The overseas Chinese leaders may gain status through their contacts with the Chinese officials, and for local officials in China, achievements in the overseas Chinese policy arena are of great importance (in terms of promotion and political status). In addition, there are more direct benefits attached, for Chinese officials travelling abroad will be entertained and provided for by native-place associations.

The overseas Chinese associations in Europe have been constructed on different principles, such as according to the politics of the Taiwan issue, migration history, native place, careers, age, gender, place of residence, and so on. Other principles seem obvious and clear, but the native place becomes a principle to divide people based on belonging in a sentimental sense. We have already discussed aspects of how native-place associations come about. Specific elements often cited as reasons are dialect, but in many cases, the native-place association is only marginally able to maintain the dialect of a region as a speech form in the group, and in other cases, the language form of an association is Mandarin. This is not only the case with the Beijing native-place associations, but also with several other ones. The social language of people involved with associations is often Cantonese or Mandarin, and they are not able to use the dialect of their homeland properly.

As language is not a core issue, culture and habits may be, but the interviewees were largely unable to state any strong defining characteristics of sub-ethnic cultures, traditions and habits, except that such differences were taken for granted.

Does sub-ethnic identity exist? It is used politically by officials in China and among the overseas Chinese, so it does exist. It represents a variety of pressures of interests. It defines itself in contrast to a national identity, as complementary to it. It also defines itself in stereotypical difference from other native-place identities.

In the following section, I will examine how the use of social capital allows sub-ethnic identities to define themselves in difference from each other.

3.2 The Utility of Social Capital

Aihwa Ong (1999) and Thomas Faist (2000) have used Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "social capital" (Bourdieu 1988) to analyse migration as a social resource in the transnational social space. Here I also borrow Bourdieu's social capital concept to analyse the overseas Chinese

distributive identity. Unlike Faist, I am not concerned with the transient status of the overseas Chinese, and unlike Ong, I focus on the specific nature of overseas Chinese's identification without regard for how its is positioned in more universal terms.

Bourdieu pointed out:

> Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationship may exist only in the practical state, in material instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose reacknowledgment of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space (Bourdieu 1988, 248-249).

Social capital in Bourdieu's sense exists, moves, and increases in a field defined by Bourdieu as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu 1992, 97). Here I shall not explain the detail of "field", but seek to analyse how social capital functions in the overseas Chinese community in Europe.

3.2.1 Specific Social Position and Multiple Social Relations

As a migrant group, the overseas Chinese have a specific social position in Europe. At least, an overseas Chinese may have three basic social relations: With the overseas Chinese community, with China, and with the host society. For the people who migrated from South East Asia, they have an additional relationship with their former country of residence.

The complicated migration background of many overseas Chinese created multiple social relations. For example, those who migrated from the Mainland to Hong Kong and later from Hong Kong to Europe can claim social relations with the Mainland, Hong Kong and Europe.

Some migrated from the Mainland to Taiwan, then to Europe, and can claim relations with the Mainland, Taiwan and Europe. Some born in South East Asia, educated in China (Mainland or Taiwan), before migrating to Europe, can claim relations with South East Asia, China and Europe. The potential of multiple claims is important as it signifies access to resources in different quarters.

Their relations with China or Europe may also be "multiple" within these categories. I have already given long descriptions of the complex, almost intractable norms of the objects of identification (in sections 1 and 2 of this paper). The lack of firm definitions of where homeland is has to do with the fact that it can be realised in various scales, and it can take different directions. Homeland can melt together not only with China or some place in China, but also with the area of residence in Europe. Migration is the key to this multiplicity, for it gives the opportunity to assert difference. Migration history has formed the overseas Chinese into various social positions and created multiple social relations.

One example concerns a migrant from Hong Kong's New Territories to the UK. This person from Lin Village, whose ancestors originated in Mei county (Guangdong), is a Hakka speaker, now resident in the UK, active in the Chinese restaurant business in Manchester Chinese Town, and politically leans towards the Mainland. In his particular position, he may join the Lin Village native-place association, the Tsung Tsin Association (i.e. the Hakka organisation), the Manchester Chinatown Association, the Chinese Catering Association in the UK, and the Overseas Chinese Unity Association in Manchester (Hua Lian She). This person's social position allows him or her to take part in different associations, join different groups, and so claim multiple social identities. His social position furnishes this person with a plethora of homeland identities.

Of course, this person may regard the Lin Village, or New Territories, Hong Kong, or Mei county, or Guangdong as homeland. And the fellow villagers may be the people who came from Lin village, from the New Territories, from Hong Kong, from Mei county, from Guangdong, or they may be Hakka people. If this person has a "great China" (da Zhongguo) notion, he or she may have a "big fellow villager" (da tongxiang) identity, regarding all Chinese with the same affection.

The multiple identity may come from one's multiple social relations which were made possible by one's particular social position. (It should be kept in mind that a particular social position is not equivalent to social status). The multiple identity makes the terms homeland and fellow villager complicated and flexible.

The particular social position of a person is a particular form of capital; it represents inalienable attributes of the person, which have the potential of being valuable. The constellation of these diverse potentialities in one person marks that person as unique in the wider social system. The social system of the overseas Chinese associations (in particular the native-place associations) help the overseas Chinese realise their particular social position.

3.2.2 The Choice and Utility of Social Resources

We can now begin to understand the ambivalence of the interviewees. The native-place associations join together constellations of people who share some particular social positions; these people can often also claim particularity in other contexts. Some of the interviewees regard these functions as harmful to the Chinese community as such, while others regard them as integrative, as supportive of unity.

Sub-ethnic belonging, therefore, allows the realisation of social capital which may help people to increase their total capital account.[4] The relation of family, clan, and fellow villager is a resource often used by migrants. The social utility of such bonds may, accordingly be translated into other forms of capital.

But Ong (1999) pointed out that for immigrants, the cultural and social capital transformations in the host society may show a deficit because of social exclusion:

> the reproduction of social power, especially for the newcomer deploying start-up symbolic capital, is never guaranteed or certain, especially when he or she embodies other signs - for example, skin colour, foreign accent, and cultural taste - that may count as symbolic deficits in the host society (Ong 1999, 91).

When the overseas Chinese found that their symbolic capital is difficult to transform directly in the host society, they may let it undergo an "internal" transformation and accumulation first, in order to adjust their capital structure, and increase it. That may help them get more power to join into the host society's capital exchange process. That is why some thought that the native-place association may help the overseas Chinese integrate into the host society.

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[4] Bourdieu considers three types of capital: the economic, cultural, and social capital. He normally regards cultural and social capital as symbolic capital. Different types of capital may transform from one type to another (Bourdieu 1988).

But how may overseas Chinese gain social power from the association, and with this social power increase their capital? Some interviewees pointed out, when the overseas Chinese organise an association, to represent a group of Chinese in the name of this association, it is easier to contact and negotiate with the government (either the Chinese government and the resident country's government).

For example, they mentioned, if they use an association's name when going to China to look for investment opportunities, at least the Chinese government welcomes them more warmly and pays more attention to them. To use the association's name to contact Chinese officials is more convenient than to use one's own name. The situation is the same when the Chinese try to contact the host country's government. If the Chinese use a personal name to contact the host country's government to express their opinions, like applying for support for a Chinese language school, or solving immigration problems, they find it difficult.

What do I mean by the term distributive identity? I mean that the overseas Chinese tend to have multiple identities or multiple layers of an identity that link them into a variety of situations and join them together with other Chinese in complex and erratic patterns of integration. The Chinese identity is not just one set of norms, but a variety of affiliations that can be realised at various scales and in different situations. The identity is, so to say, *distributed* across many criteria.

The social utility of this distributed identity is that it provides the individual with a social capital; it also ensures a certain level of equality among the members of the community, for it will be impossible for any one individual to occupy all particular social positions.

3.3 Conclusion: Constructing Distributive Identity

Many interviewees considered that their ethnic Chinese identity and other sub-ethnic group identities come from their cultural background, and are natural. They do not recognise them as social interaction, the social capital production that realises their distributive identity. However, I believe that the creation of social capital is an outcome of the distributive identity. The ethnic identity among the overseas Chinese community leaders in Europe provides an outline of the process of constructing the distributive identity.

Overseas Chinese have a problem with integrating with the host society, they feel it difficult to transform their symbolic capital within the host society (this may be due to social discrimination, or the limit of personal skills, like language skills). This situation pushes the overseas Chinese to interact together, to unite as a whole.

Some people seek advantages and use different factors, like the native place, the dialect, the common habit to construct common points of identification, in order to build up a special friendship and social relation. These processes are not new, they are well-proven in other contexts. Once the process of sub-group differentiation has gained momentum, it causes similar groups to form, as well.

Because the individual can join different sub-groups, he or she may gain different social or economic advantages by switching between them or utilising them at the same time.

Social practice among Chinese migrants in Europe has created a dynamic system of multiple identification that serves the purpose of establishing community status for its members. This complex system causes ideas of fellow villagers and homeland to be flexible and vague.

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